



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Play for adults

Citation for published version:

Diaz-Varela, A & Wright, LHV 2020, 'Play for adults: Play-based approaches in teacher training', *Scottish Educational Review*, vol. 51, no. 2, pp. 132-136. <<https://www.scotedreview.org.uk/online-content/2019/512/>>

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

Scottish Educational Review

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Play for Adults: Play-Based Approaches in Teacher Training

Andrea Diaz-Varela¹ and Laura H.V. Wright²

¹Right To Play International, ²University of Edinburgh

ABSTRACT

Although play exemplifies one of the highest forms of experiential learning and can foster creativity and innovation in adults, it is less frequently used explicitly in adult training. This short article explores a play-based approach to enhance teachers' confidence in using play-based pedagogy through a case study on the Continuum of Teacher Training (COTT), Right To Play International's in-service teacher training programme. The CoTT is a 21-day programme, which is contextualized and delivered in 16 countries. It integrates play-based learning methods into teaching practice while aligning with local curriculum and infusing academic content with social-emotional skills development. The article concludes with preliminary insights on the impact of the model on children's social-emotional learning and academic achievement and argues for the critical importance of play for adults to support intergenerational relationships and quality play-based approaches.

KEYWORDS: *play-based pedagogy; playful learning; adult learning; teacher training; intergenerational relationships*

INTRODUCTION

Play "exemplifies one of the highest forms of experiential learning" (Kolb & Kolb 2010: 47), with Singer *et al.* (2006) proclaiming that play equals learning. It is no surprise that play and playfulness have been subject to much research in the context of young children's learning (Johnson *et al.* 2005; Ellis 1973; Lieberman 1977). However, experiential learning provides a structure for learners to be playful at any age (not only young children) and creates space for cognitive spontaneity; an attribute Liebermann (1977) suggests is marked by curiosity, inventiveness, imagination and innovation. While many pedagogical approaches described in the literature might be defined as types of playful learning, it is less common that those used with adults are identified as such (Whitton 2018: 1). More generally, research on playfulness for adults is limited, notwithstanding some recent interest (Dobson & McKendrick 2018). This article contributes to this broader endeavor by reflecting on the role of play in the context of teacher training in higher education. The article is organized in the following manner. First, it introduces Right To Play

International's in-service Continuum of Teacher Training programme as a play-based approach to teacher training. Second, the article highlights the role of teacher training on enhancing skills and the social emotional learning of teachers themselves. Third, it introduces the role of communities of practice, and fourth it highlights the importance of intergenerational play between teachers and young people. Finally, the paper concludes by highlighting the critical value of play in adult education and its implications for both teachers and students' learning and social emotional development.

CONTINUUM OF TEACHER TRAINING (COTT)

Founded in 2001, Right To Play International has worked across 40 countries with a mission to protect, educate and empower children using the power of play. The *Continuum of Teacher Training* (COTT) is a professional development programme developed by Right To Play International, which is designed to foster teachers' creativity and enhance their potential to use play for learning in the classroom (Right To Play 2015). It has been designed for pre-primary and primary school teachers, and includes training resources for teacher supervisors and trainers. Through a series of training sessions and ongoing support, teachers attain new knowledge, and gain skills and experiences. This enables them to teach subject matter through play, and to lead regular sport and play activities for life skills development. Ongoing coaching and mentoring by district government officials and trainers, who themselves are both also trained in coaching and mentoring through play, supports teachers to integrate their learning into their classroom teaching. Monthly meetings of teacher communities of practice are also infused with play to encourage self-reflection and goal setting. The COTT was developed between 2015 and 2017 by Right to Play International, in partnership with education and child development practitioners and academic experts in Toronto, Canada (including the Ontario Institute School of Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto). It was designed to be adaptable to local training needs and contexts through further collaboration with local partners. The COTT has been adapted, contextualized, and administered in Benin, Burundi, Ethiopia, Ghana, Jordan, Lebanon, Liberia, Palestine, Mali, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.

The COTT package consists of three pillars: a) training, b) coaching and mentoring, and c) teacher communities of practice. Training content, on play-based learning methodology and positive learning environment practices (such as child rights, protection, participation, gender equality and inclusion), is delivered using a play-based approach. Specifically, this means training is facilitated through song, dance, games, small and large group discussions, brainstorming activities, energizers and other play-based activities. The learning activities in the training are varied and target as many learning styles as possible. By using play as a training approach in the training sessions, the intention is for teachers to be more able to sense the value of play in their own learning and thus its value for their own students. The learning approach seeks to create a shift in teachers' understandings and perspectives of what 'good teaching' looks like (away from lecturing and rote memorization), leading to a shift in their teaching behaviour (towards facilitation of games, group work, and critical reflection).

TEACHERS' PRACTICAL SKILLS AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Training through play not only builds teacher capacity to use play-based learning in their teaching practice, but also builds skills in teachers that support their creative autonomy in teaching (Right To Play 2016). This is achieved through training in lesson planning and by intentionally embedding reflective practice.

Instead of being asked to follow scripted lessons and memorize games, teachers are trained in the ability to continuously adapt or generate their own new, locally relevant games and activities, focused on a curriculum objective. In this way, teachers are able to apply their play-based training to many different subjects and grade levels, and to tailor their lessons to the needs of the classroom. The experiential learning methodology also creates a space, which is conducive to bolstering teachers' self-confidence, promoting ownership of their teaching, and fostering their capacity to think critically and adapt. All training requires critical reflection – teachers learn analytical and decision-making skills to reflect on their own teaching, seek feedback from students, and constantly improve their learning. In this way, they take control of their own professional development while having the opportunity to play and learn with and from their colleagues and students. Through self-directed and peer-to-peer learning they also continue to innovate and design their own games and activities, and enhance their skills through shared learning.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE AND LEARNING

Teachers who are learning through, and actively introducing, play and playful approaches can collaboratively build communities of practice to motivate one another, share best practices, and collectively explore solutions to overcome challenges. Communities of practice are recognized as groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger *et al.* 2002). For example, Right To Play's COTT package includes play-based CoP facilitation guides for monthly meetings over three years that combine play-based activities and games with accompanying reflection sessions. A critical component of the COTT, the sessions are designed to encourage teachers to collectively explore different issues areas through play and to sustain their learning and reflection. While guides can be useful, it is also critical that CoP's are playful, organic, flexible, dynamic, and group-led. As such, teachers across international contexts honing in on play-based methodologies explore diverse and creative ways to foster community, which has included social media (e.g. whatsapp, Facebook groups, Twitter), local meetups, and visiting and sharing in one another's classroom spaces. A playful CoP has scope to deepen relationships with content as well as with peers, and self.

PLAY AS A VEHICLE FOR BUILDING INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Play tends to be recognized as “a valuable tool for social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development of younger children [yet] concurrently, it is often discredited for use by adults” (Wright 2018: 239). While there is much literature on intergenerational play between seniors and younger children, there is a dearth of

literature on the use of play for intergenerational learning between teachers and their students. Socio-cultural theory “foregrounds relationship in learning” and highlights the importance of social interactions within a learning process (Tobbell & Donell 2013: 13). Kolb & Kolb (2010) argue that play in learning supports individuals to “gradually [begin] to peel off their game face and freely express” (p.44) themselves, which has the potential to reduce power constructs through creating space for adults and children to take on new playful roles outside of their structured roles of teacher and child, creating space for relationships to form and deepen. Once relationships are formed, play can also foster co-learning opportunities between students and teachers. Play can create space for teachers to enhance their own learning and capacity to engage with and seek feedback from their students. In this process, adults can become more engaged and open to actively listen to their students, respecting their expertise and insights, and taking these into account in classroom decision-making processes. Similarly, through play adults can foster interactive experiential learning opportunities for their students that further enhance their capacity to develop social, emotional, and cognitive competencies, enabling them to thrive in their academic and personal lives (Pyle & Danniels 2017; Weisberg *et al.* 2013). In Right To Play, where teachers have been trained in COTT, positive learning environments are strengthened, and the academic performance of students is improved (Treeangles Ltd. 2015). Furthermore, it has been observed through Right to Play programmes that teachers’ self-confidence and self-esteem in their role is bolstered.

CONCLUSION

Despite growing recognition that playfulness and play is advantageous for adult education particularly in the grey literature and at a programmatic level, there is limited explicit discussion globally around the use of play in teacher training for teachers working with children from primary to secondary school. The incorporation of play throughout teacher training affords adults the opportunity to revitalize their playful selves and engage in playful opportunities, which enables them to better relate to their students and to more effectively facilitate lessons in their classroom. Playful learning opportunities also have the potential to enhance relationships among colleagues and to facilitate intergenerational learning. This case study has elucidated the importance of integrating play-based education into pre-service and in-service teacher training. We conclude by introducing recommendations to explore in teacher education in Scotland and internationally. We recommend encouraging teachers’ own creativity, promoting collaborative learning, and teacher autonomy; this could be achieved by supporting them to develop confidence and skills to innovate and to devise games and activities to meet their needs. We also posit communities of practice as vital places for teachers to play and reflect, allowing them to experiment with diverse activities, build trust and to not feel uncomfortable if innovations do not work as planned. We assert that greater advocacy is needed to promote the value of play in education from early years up to secondary school (and beyond) and to encourage greater inter-generational play to value play at all levels. Finally, we recommend that training on children’s meaningful participation in play-based workshops is embraced and

teachers play alongside young people, respecting young people's ideas and undertaking shared decision-making in the classroom.

REFERENCES

- Bennett, N., Wood, L. & Rogers, S. (1997) *Teaching Through Play*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bridgeland, J., Bruce, M. & Hariharan, A. (2012) *The Missing Piece: A National Teacher Survey on how Social and Emotional Learning can Empower Children and Transform Schools*. A Report for CASEL. Washington: Civil Enterprises and Peter D. Hart Research Associates.
- Cleave, S., & Brown, S. (1989) *Four Year Olds in School: Meeting Their Needs*, Slough: NfER.
- Dobson, S., & McKendrick, J. (2018) Intrapreneurial spaces to entrepreneurial cities: Making sense of play and playfulness. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, 19(2), 75–80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465750318770974>
- Eisenberg, N., Valiente, C., & Eggum, N.D. (2010) Self-regulation and School Readiness, *Early Education and Development*, 21(5), 681-698.
- Elias, J.E. & Zins, M.J. (2007) Social and Emotional Learning: Promoting the Development of all Students, *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 17(2-3), 233-255.
- Greenberg, M.T., Domitrovich, C.E., Weissberg, R.P., & Durlak, J.A. (2017) Social and Emotional Learning as a Public Health Approach to Education, *The Future of Children*, 27(1), 13-32.
- Ellis, M.J. (1973) *Why People Play*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Kolb, A.Y. & Kolb, D.A. (2005) Learning Styles and Learning Spaces: Enhancing Learning In Higher Education, *Journal of Academy of Management & Education*, 4(2), 193-212.
- Kolb, A.Y., & Kolb, D.A. (2010) Learning to Play, Playing to Learn: Case Study of a Ludic Learning Space, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 23, 26-50.
- Lieberman, J.N. (1977) *Playfulness*, New York: Academic Press.
- Pascal, C. (1990) *Under Fives in the Infant Classroom*, Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.
- Pyle, A., & Danniels, E. (2017) A continuum of play-based learning: The role of the teacher in play-based pedagogy and the fear of hijacking play. *Early Education and Development*, 28(3), 274-289.
- Right To Play. (2015) *Continuum of Teacher Training Package*. Toronto: Right To Play
- Right To Play. (2016) *Literacy & Numeracy Through Play-Based Learning*, Research Brief. Toronto: Right To Play.
- Singer, D.G., Golinkoff, R.M. and Hirsh-Pasek, K. (2006) *Play = Learning: How Play Motivates and Enhances Children's Cognitive and Social-emotional Growth*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Tobbell, J., & O'Donnell, V. L. (2013) The formation of interpersonal and learning relationships in the transition from primary to secondary school: Students, teachers and school context. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 59, 11-23.
- Treeangles Ltd. (2015) *End of Program Evaluation Report*. NORAD, Right To Play: Tonbridge UK.
- Weare, K. & Nind, M. (2011) Mental Health Promotion and Problem Prevention in Schools: What Does the Evidence Say? *Health Promotion International*, 26, 129-169.
- Weisberg, D. S., Zosh, J. M., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2013) Talking It Up: Play, Language Development, and the Role of Adult Support. *American Journal of Play*, 6(1), 39-54.
- Wenger, E., McDermott, R.A., & Snyder, W. (2002) *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge*. Massachusetts: Harvard Business Press. 1-14.
- Whitton, N. (2018) Playful Learning: Tools, Techniques, and Tactics. *Research in Learning Technology*, 26.
- Wright, L.H.V. (2018) Play: Fostering Relationships That Inspire Positive Change in Young People's Meaningful Participation. *Canadian Journal on Children's Rights*, 5(1), 223-253.